

NASSAU COUNTY'S HEALTH DEPARTMENT LIBRARY

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The knowledge explosion is no longer a possibility—it is fact. Nowhere is this more evident than in the health sciences. Horizons appear boundless, and each day brings a deluge of new content and materials. To organize and make available this tremendous variety of information requires knowledgeable staff and practical measures—measures to ensure easy access to written and visual materials and to the equipment and services which speed meaningful learning. For one health department, the first practical measure was to establish a central clearinghouse for information where the many materials scattered throughout a large and diverse organization could either be housed or their existence recorded for ready reference.

Many large medical libraries today are amazingly sophisticated in equipment and services. Students and faculty associated with medical schools reap untold benefits from this progress. From reading the literature one might assume that a small library without computerized services is an anachronism. However, even with a well-developed computer system, a need will exist for departmental library services. Not every doctor, nurse, or engineer has access to a large up-to-date library. The value of service available in the department cannot be measured.

It is always difficult to move from a situation in which each professional selects and supervises his own materials and to work toward developing a central library which acquires all materials and serves everyone in the department. The commissioner of the Nassau County (N.Y.) Department of Health appointed a committee with a representative from each major division of the department to tackle this task.

The office of public health education provided staff for the library committee, and space was designated for centralizing library services.

Some resistance to giving up carefully accumulated collections of material was evinced. After a professional librarian was hired and some extra library services were developed, there was a change in attitude. More members of the professional staff began to offer books and journals to the library because items placed there were retrievable on demand.

Centralized Library Services

As public health departments expand and the national programs of community health services and regional medical planning generate new concerns, separate divisional libraries in a health department have less validity. The Nassau County public health library encourages multidisciplinary mixing by compiling semimonthly folders of photocopied tables of contents from every magazine and journal received by the department and circulating the folders among the administrative staff. Health professionals can review subject matter in a few minutes and phone the library for photocopies of the articles. This current contents service has eliminated much routine journal routing and increased the staff's reading of current materials.

The library's monthly newsletter, *Locus*, carries an eye-catching masthead design and lists recent acquisitions. A few paragraphs about library services open each issue so that the entire staff can learn what new services are available. For example, talking book equipment provided through the local public library system was described in one issue; another dealt with access

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to the Federal Government Documents Depository Library.

Since Nassau County has fine library resources, both medical and general, the health department library specializes in public health rather than purely medical materials. Environmental health topics, including air and water pollution, water resources, pest control, and other sanitation information are covered. Aspects of public health administration, such as program planning and budgeting and comprehensive health planning, are major considerations.

Planning of all kinds depends on information. A department with a public health library working hand in hand with a health information system can provide essential know-how for comprehensive health planning.

The health department is developing a health information system to function as a single, central unit to provide for the collection, analysis, storage, and retrieval of data concerning community health services; to provide the means by which analysis and evaluation of available health services may be made; and to delineate the goals for which information is developed according to potential needs of users of such information.

The growing responsibilities of the department for the Medicare and Medicaid programs require materials on poverty, quality of medical care, and neighborhood health centers. There is also a growing demand for materials about the behavioral sciences because "comprehensive medicine requires an understanding of psychological and social factors involved in health and illness" (1).

Program expansion in all areas of county government (the health department now has more than 600 employees) necessitates sophisticated techniques to ensure smooth functioning. Therefore, materials on administration and personnel management are also collected.

As public health becomes involved with regional planning, the need for more health information becomes paramount. The library provides sources of research information, subscribes to journals covering the broadest view of medical care, and collects materials on information retrieval methods, since that is, after all, its business. The air pollution division, the

laboratory, and the bureau of hospitals and nursing homes retain their own collections, but the central library keeps bibliographic control of these minicollections and they are a part of the whole.

Staff

The library staff consists of a full-time librarian, a library assistant, and an aide. A clerical pool provides necessary services. During the summer a college student is employed as a library page, and from time to time students from the local community college health course do volunteer work. Because the library is "an access point through which the entire scholarly record can be acquired for any qualified user" (2), its head has a masters degree in library science. Other requirements are ability to grasp subject information, knowledge of sources and resources, and familiarity with modern methods of information retrieval.

Services

The department library is a modern service organization. The routines of cataloging, classifying, and shelving books are merely tools for the real mission—service to people. The people in this case are, primarily, the staff of the department. Although professional staff people make more demands, the library serves clerical staff, trainees, and students as well. Answers to questions (amounting to about 4,000 per year) may require supplying a book or magazine, a list of books or articles, a photocopy of an article or a chart, or a summary of information from a number of sources.

Almost all the materials in the collection can be borrowed. When it is appropriate, photocopies of articles are made rather than circulating bound journal volumes. Since some books and journals are in individual offices, the library acts as a clearinghouse for these items, which later are returned to their original locations.

Occasionally, a particularly valuable journal article or book prompts the library to send a memorandum notifying the persons most likely to be interested, or the items are routed directly. On request the librarian searches the literature on particular topics, utilizing indexes and abstracts and knowledge of library resources.

As the library develops, it also finds ways to

serve the wider community, either through interlibrary loan or directly for students and professionals who need public health materials. As community health planning programs grow, the library will be one of the contacts with other health agencies in the community. The librarian is available for consultation services to the voluntary health agencies. Medical librarians on Long Island cooperate in many ways, and the health department library staff is in touch with all of them through local organizations.

The library staff is searching for ways to encourage wider access to hospital medical libraries, since most solutions to health manpower problems include upgrading paramedical personnel through inservice training—and the hospital library can contribute to this process. "Health care and research now employ a complex of professional people and technicians, all of whom need access to the scholarly records" (2).

The physician is likely to have wide access to many libraries and services. This is not necessarily true for any other health professional.

His work is confined to one institution. If no library service is available in that institution, either because there is no library or because he is denied access to the library services that do exist (not an uncommon situation), access to the scholarly record is limited to only what he purchases for his personal library (2).

All books and periodicals purchased by the department are ordered through the library. This purchasing method precludes duplication and allows the librarian to advise about new materials and arrange for economical purchase. It also serves to keep the librarian informed about new interests of the staff and alerts her to watch for materials in new areas of interest.

The department produces, as well as purchases, audiovisual materials. These are stored and distributed by the library. Sets of 35-mm. slides, audiotapes of important lectures, 16-mm. health films, information on health films, and their sources are retained and made available. New films are reviewed for the staff and evaluations recorded.

Interlibrary Loan

No modern library can afford everything (3), so the library ignores the advice of Polonius and depends on interlibrary loans. In 1967, the

library borrowed from the State Legislative Library in Albany and from the National Library of Medicine in Washington and received computer printed bibliographies from the Defense Documentation Center and from the National Library of Medicine. National and State resources are accessible through the library, but usually it is easier and quicker to borrow locally.

Nassau County is fortunate in its library resources. The Nassau Library System, a cooperative effort of the county public libraries, is a treasure house. The system has a service center for local libraries which has attracted national attention for its computerized services and its reference collection. The system cooperates with the health department library, locating individual books in one of its 50 member libraries and answering reference questions of many kinds. In turn, health department materials are distributed through the system to local libraries.

The libraries of the outstanding colleges and universities of Nassau and Suffolk Counties also provide books and journals for department needs. For medical resources, the library depends heavily on the Medical Research Library of Brooklyn at the Downstate Medical Center. This collection is of great assistance, and the service is supported by an NLM grant. The Long Island Branch of the Medical Library Association includes the librarians of the Nassau Academy of Medicine, most of the hospital libraries, and a few industrial organizations. It has published a cooperative listing of all the periodicals held in these libraries. The volume is in constant use as a library resource. The health department library also lends through interlibrary loan. There are frequent requests from the hospital libraries and occasionally from the Medical Research Library of Brooklyn and the Nassau Library System.

Cost of Operations and Planned Spending

The library is included in the regular health department budget. Annual costs include not only staff salaries and the increasing number of books, journals, and audiovisual materials, but also space and maintenance. With these included, the Nassau County Department of Health Library costs about \$50,000 a year.

Recently, the library received a resource

grant, renewable for 5 years, from the National Library of Medicine. The first year's money, \$7,700, will be spent on microfilm readers and microfilm copies of journals and reports. For the years to come, there are plans to develop programmed education for staff and patients (such as information for diabetics and parent education) and to expand the audiovisual services of the library.

Plans for a new health department administration building include a good-sized library with room for the department staff to do research; space to screen slides, films, and tapes; and an expanded collection to meet the increasing needs of health programs. Carrels and equipment for programmed instruction will be available. Offices for interns and residents will be in an adjacent area. The library, then as now, will function as a part of the biomedical communications structure of the department.

Summary

The Nassau County Department of Health developed a public health library. The first step was to establish a library committee, representing major divisions of the department, to assist in a smooth transition from collections of books in individual offices to a central library.

Centralized library services for everyone in the department include ordering publications, issuing a library newsletter and a current contents service, making bibliographic searches, and obtaining interlibrary loans from local and distant resources. The subjects covered by the

collection include community health planning and administration as well as the standard public health fields. The library stores and locates audiovisual materials for the department and the community. Community services include consultation to voluntary health agencies and cooperation with hospital libraries and the local public library system.

The staff is headed by a professional librarian. With a resource grant, the library will purchase microforms and microform equipment, expand its audiovisual services, and develop areas of programmed education for staff and patients. Since planning depends on information, the health department with a library as part of its biomedical communications structure will be better prepared for the comprehensive health programs of the near future.

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- (3) Atwood, R.: An anemometer for I.L.L. winds. *College and Research Libraries* 29: 285-291, July 1968.

Limited Surplus of Bound Volumes of *Public Health Reports*

A few copies of bound volumes of *Public Health Reports* for past years are available to interested libraries of educational institutions and health departments. Sets of volumes are not complete. The surplus supply includes volumes 67-69 (1952-54), volumes 71-75 (1956-60), and volumes 77-79 (1962-64). Requests for volumes will be filled on a first received-first answered basis. Address requests to *Public Health Reports*, Lee Building, 6935 Wisconsin Avenue, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20015.